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AUTHOR	Paige, Rod
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ABSTRACT

This report presents U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige's "back to school" address to the National Press Club on September 4, 2001. Noting that little progress has been made despite $147 billion spent on federal education programs since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the speech discusses the principles of the "No Child Left Behind" policy of the George W. Bush administration. The speech highlights several major points: that when we all work together, we can create a culture in which parents have more educational choices, teachers have more resources, districts have more flexibility, everyone has more information related to accountability, and "no child is left behind"; that Congress can be very productive when bipartisan cooperation predominates and that similar progress can occur in states, school districts, and classrooms when people work together across ideological lines; that schools and school districts must consolidate small categorical programs into larger, more flexible programs that emphasize service delivery; and that parents, taxpayers, community leaders, and state officials need to know which schools are succeeding and which schools are failing. The importance of starting early to enhance student success is discussed. The speech also mentions the need for a systematic review of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to examine possibilities for educational reform related to education of children with disabilities. The speech concludes with a challenge to make the educational changes needed to make sure that children learn. (KB)

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Back to School, Moving Forward

What "No Child Left Behind" Means for Parents, Schools and Communities

The 2001 Back to School Address

Rod Paige
U.S. Secretary of Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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What *No Child Left Behind* Means for Parents, Schools and Communities

The 2001 Back to School Address

Rod Paige
U.S. Secretary of Education

Sept. 4, 2001

National Press Club
Washington, D.C.

U.S. Department of Education
Rod Paige
Secretary

September 2001

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The 2001 Back to School Address

Rod Paige
U.S. Secretary of Education

Thank you. I am happy to be at the National Press Club and honored to deliver a back-to-school address that has become a tradition for the secretary of education.

Back-to-school is an exciting time for students, parents, educators, and the secretary of education. New students gather in new classrooms with new teachers and new supplies, but back-to-school time holds more in store for our students than sharp pencils and fresh paper. This is a time of promise and anticipation for the school year ahead. There is a lot to learn and much to achieve before the next summer vacation, and students and teachers are eager to get started. I have been visiting schools all across the country the last few days, and the energy is contagious.

My guests today are also caught up in back-to-school fever. They are Linda Butler, a reading specialist who has trained teachers in Washington, D.C., in effective reading instruction as part of a program headed by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, and Mikea Brandon, a fourth-grade student at Seaton Elementary School in Washington, D.C., who participated in that reading intervention program. Their energy reminds me of many back-to-school cycles when I was a superintendent.

They also remind me of an experience from eight months ago. As I waited for my confirmation hearing, I took the opportunity to become a student of the history of federal education legislation. Thirty-five years ago, another president from Texas,

Lyndon Johnson, had a vision for reforming the federal role in education.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, known in this town as ESEA, was the result of that vision. This is the legislation that first carved out a significant role for the federal government in public education. Considered by President Johnson to be one of the keys to his Great Society program, ESEA made it the policy of the federal government to provide financial assistance through Title I to schools that served large numbers of disadvantaged students so they could receive additional instruction and assistance.

Over the past quarter of a century, the federal government has spent $125 billion dollars of taxpayers' money on Title I alone. That's an impressive amount of money to help disadvantaged school districts to succeed at the things Title I was set up to do. But after all that spending, while there are pockets of excellence scattered across this country, overall, we have little progress to show for it. Over the past decade, spending has skyrocketed, but student achievement at every level and in every subject barely budged. In some cases, it went down.

While there are excellent schools across America, our system is failing too many children. Nearly 70 percent of inner city and rural fourth-graders can't read at a basic level. There is a persistent achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. Reading scores have been flat for the past eight years. The numbers show us that what we're doing is not working. I want to stop for a moment and reiterate this point—we know that what we have been doing for the past 10 years has not worked. The skills and knowledge of our children are not getting better. It is time for something new.

You all remember President Bush outlining the principles of *No Child Left Behind* back in January, and you've all watched as Congress passed versions of the plan by overwhelming bipartisan majorities. I don't need to recount recent history in much detail, but what the progress of the past several months should tell us is that Washington has come to realize that it is time for something new.

I think you will agree with me that what we have seen this year has been remarkable. Last year, members of Congress struggled over positioning when it came to education reform as well as many other issues. They failed to reauthorize the ESEA, and let politics, rather than good education policy, carry the day.

This year, though, the spirit of bipartisanship was evident from January onward. From my first meeting with Senator Edward Kennedy, we hit it off famously—much better than I, as a Republican, might have expected a year ago. We worked well together, and so did the president and the other Democrats on Capitol Hill, such as Congressman George Miller. Congressman Miller and Senator Kennedy worked well with their Republican counterparts, Congressman John Boehner and Senator Judd Gregg. Thanks to their cooperation and hard work, the education bill passed both houses with the kind of vote totals you normally see on resolutions honoring Mother's Day: 91 to 8 in the Senate, and 384 to 45 in the House. That's a big difference from no bill at all last year.

The leaders on education in the House and Senate have shown that they are more interested in getting things done than in getting credit. As they return to Washington this week, I know they will keep the needs of our students foremost in their minds—and that they will continue their hard work and deliver a final education bill to President Bush soon. Congress has made great progress this year, and it now stands at a crossroads. As it finishes the last lap, it must choose between Washington, D.C., politics and educational progress. Our children need better schools. This legislation will give them better schools, and, as Americans, we should not be willing to ask our children to wait another year for that help.

I have seen a spirit of change in many of the schools I have visited to mark the new school year. But I know we need to see more of it and at more schools. If we press on and finish a good bill, districts and teachers and the Department of Education will have time to begin putting the reforms into practice for next year. If we choose the road toward progress, we can meet here at back-to-school time next year and talk about reforms that are well

under way. But if we choose politics instead of progress, every child who could benefit from our work will be a year older and harder to reach.

If we care about our students' progress more than politics, we want Washington to focus on progress, not politics. And by watching what members of Congress do, we will learn what their priorities are.

One thing we have already learned from Congress is how productive we can be when we work together. I just mentioned that the progress we made on ESEA this year is a result of bipartisan cooperation. For the same spirit of progress to take root across states, school districts and classrooms, we must follow Congress's lead, and work together, across ideological lines. Superintendents and teachers' unions can blame each other until summer vacation and lose sight of the reason they are both there, which is to ensure that students learn. Our children do not need adults who measure success in dollars or compliance. Our children don't need adults who make excuses for their failures. Our children need adults who focus on results. Our children deserve to learn, promptly and well, and anything that distracts from their learning is a distraction from schools' mission.

Too often, those distractions include federal red tape. On my back-to-school tour, I've seen students meeting their new teachers, full of eager expectation. This student-teacher relationship is critical to learning. Every other part of our educational system exists solely to support, not hinder, the instructional relationship between students and teachers. We need to support that relationship by giving states, districts, and schools more flexibility.

We know that schools and school districts will respond to categorical programs by building bureaucracy. I have seen this dynamic so many times that I am sure it is a law of nature. Instead, we must consolidate the small categorical programs that have been the trademark of Washington into larger, more flexible programs that emphasize service delivery. Talk to principals, especially those who get federal aid, and you will hear how

much of their time is spent filling out redundant federal forms, trying to present their school in the way they expect people in Washington will want to see it. We need to free schools from federal red tape and give school districts more flexibility from federal requirements so they can focus on improving building instruction rather than managing bureaucracy.

Consolidating small and duplicative grant programs into larger and broader grants gives states and districts greater ability to meet the particular needs of their students. It also ensures that federal dollars are spent on activities that will improve student performance.

At Parklane Elementary School in Atlanta last week, I met the principal, Susan Dorenkamp. She is achieving incredible results in her school, and she has ideas for even further progress. She wants to improve teacher quality, and she needs the flexibility to do that in a way that is best for her school—not through some nationally mandated program that ignores the facts of her school, but in a manner she designs by looking at the facts. We owe it to her to give her that flexibility.

In the spring, both the House and Senate committees consolidated programs, but, as often happens, the number of programs proliferated on the floor of both chambers, especially the Senate. Instead of reducing the number of categorical programs to reduce bureaucracy in our schools and districts, the Senate passed 135 amendments to the bill—adding 29 new programs.

The House-Senate conference committee offers us another chance to consolidate programs and give schools real local control and flexibility. We must seize that opportunity for our students. Congress needs to cut down on these programs and give local schools room to achieve.

In exchange for flexibility, of course, we must demand accountability. Parents and taxpayers and community leaders and state officials all need to know which schools are succeeding, and why, and which schools are failing, and what can be done. And they need to have the power to act on this information. They

need access to objective annual tests that are aligned to state standards for what children in each grade are expected to know and be able to do.

In Florida, I visited Lancaster Elementary School, which has a huge migrant population. The principal, Joan Mahoney, uses testing effectively to track the progress of each student, to tailor teaching to each child's strengths and weaknesses, and to make sure no child falls through the cracks. Thanks to strong accountability systems that align assessment to what the state says our children should learn, Lancaster has gone from a low-performing school to a high-performing one.

And I know from my visit that more progress lies ahead for schools all across America. We are only going to see more growth and more success in the future. Reform is a dynamic process, and until we can say that no child is left behind, there is work to be done and improvement to be made.

Taking a lesson from schools like Lancaster, let's not kid ourselves about what we can achieve in Washington. The real reform, the real improvement, the real results, will occur in local schools, because the teachers and principals in those schools commit themselves to achieving results. They are the true engines of reform. That's why I am in the middle of a three-week back-to-school tour, to carry the message of accountability and results to communities across America.

I've visited public schools, charter schools, and parochial schools. I have met with teachers and community groups. During the tour I have been most impressed by high-performing schools thriving in high-poverty areas. They prove that success is not measured by money—or by the family background of the students. They take students who live in poverty, with one parent or none, with limited proficiency in English, and they produce miracles. If these schools can make it work, there is hope for our system. It has been a pleasure to highlight these high-poverty, high-performing schools and spread the word. Find what works, and copy it everywhere. These schools won't mind if others copy them. They believe in helping children, and they lead by example.

President Bush and I saw one of these schools in Albuquerque when we visited Griegos Elementary School. Many students at Griegos face poverty and language barriers—the kind of conditions some schools would use as excuses for failure. But we didn't hear excuses at Griegos—we saw success instead. The principal, Eddie Lucero, has an aggressive reading program that works. The teachers use good teaching methods and focus on helping every child to learn. The proof is in the pudding—their test scores have improved steadily for five years.

Linda Butler and Mikea Brandon, here with us today, are examples of a teacher and a student who have benefited from research-based reading techniques. We need to extend the blessings of the good reading instruction that has worked for them to every elementary school in the country.

Good reading instruction doesn't cost more, but it pays a much bigger return. The president and I have a friend in Houston who has called reading the new civil right. She is right, and all of our students deserve the best reading instruction that science and research can provide.

With reading and many other subjects, it is critical to start early. Starting early can solve many of our problems. A report this year from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Educational Achievement and Black-White Inequality*, revealed that for young adults with similar levels of prior math and reading scores, blacks were more likely to attend college than whites, and black college attendees were as likely to complete college as white college attendees.

This is good news. If we can just get young African American children off to a good start and make sure they take tough courses, they can take care of themselves as well as anyone. That's why it's critical to use research-based teaching methods that work in all of our classrooms. All of our kids can learn with the benefit of sound research. And all of our children deserve the best that science has to offer.

I just talked about the power of starting to teach our children early, particularly with reading. Parents are their children's first

teachers. No one cares more about their children's education than the parents. That's why there is no more powerful force for change than parents who are armed with information and options. If we want to improve schools, we must give parents information, through testing, and the option to use that information by expanding parental choice. School districts are much more responsive to parents who have choices.

Wealthy parents have always had options, of course. We need to give options to disadvantaged parents as well. In Kansas City last week, I visited Della Lamb Elementary Charter School, which offers an option to such parents. When local leaders take the initiative to raise money and create campuses so that disadvantaged kids will have choices, they take ownership of ensuring success in a way that all community leaders should emulate. They invest time and money, and they demand results. They give parents choices, and the parents demand results. They offer competition to local school districts, and that gives the districts an incentive to demand results. The more choices people have, the more results they will get.

The last thing I want to make sure of is that we give thorough reform to everyone. As you know, there is a disagreement about the best way to reform our services to children with disabilities.

President Bush and I want to engage a systematic review of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act so we can offer the promise of reform during the reauthorization process next year. Some have argued we should add more money through an amendment to the ESEA this year and would make that our issue. Our job is to make sure we make the issues service and research and not politics.

Last week, the Education Department hosted a Learning Disabilities Summit so we could engage advocates for children with disabilities, parents, and researchers in a discussion about what can and what must be done for our children. It was clear to me that the parents, researchers, and advocates for children with learning disabilities agree that to serve our children well, we need top-to-bottom reform of IDEA. If you were to ask them

what children with disabilities need from Washington, D.C., as we did, they would tell you that we need to do the same thing for children with disabilities as for every other child. They understand that to do otherwise would perpetuate politics and not signal progress.

We agree that all children deserve a culture of results, and it will take meaningful reform to the IDEA legislation to accomplish that. The answer is not simply to spend more money right now on an IDEA program that is not getting the job done. The answer is certainly not making that funding mandatory and locking in a system that does not serve our children. I know that we can come together and agree to give our children with disabilities the reform and the resources they need next year.

Thirty-five years after Lyndon Johnson started this effort, we've spent $147 billion dollars on federal education programs. Unfortunately, this investment didn't come close to fulfilling its purpose. So we have to ask ourselves some questions. What is the federal role in education really doing for our children? How could we spend all this money and not achieve results? Why is it, after 35 years of federal involvement, that 70 percent of inner-city and rural fourth-graders cannot read?

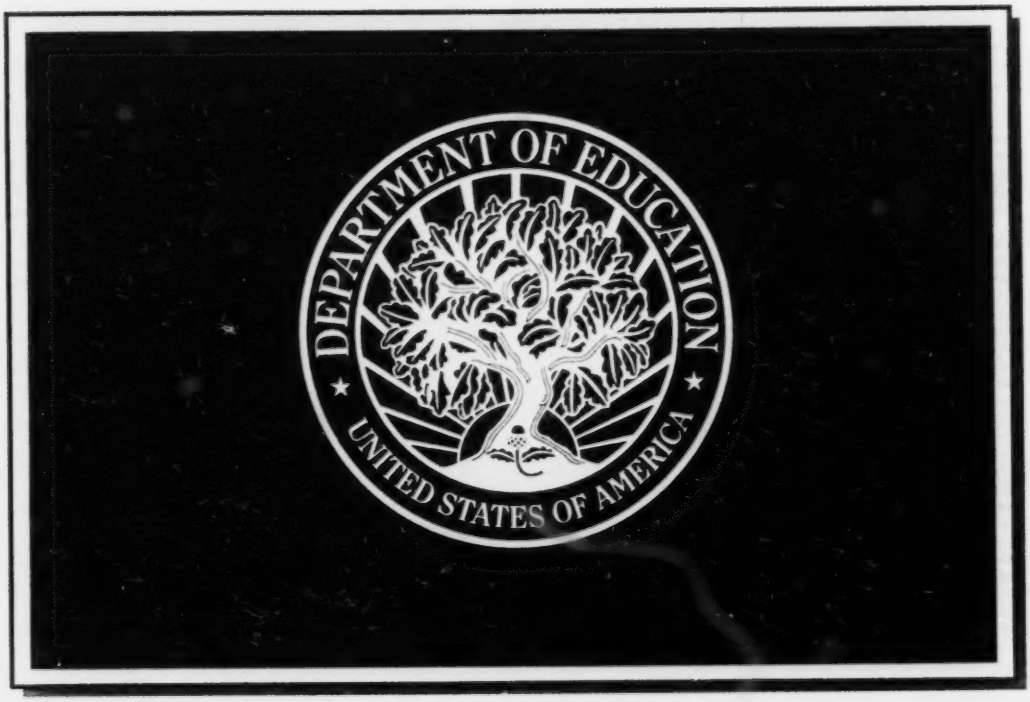
Until now, there have not been very satisfactory answers to those questions, but that is changing, because our culture of education is changing. We are starting to ask these questions of every school and every child, every year. We are starting to make the answers matter. We are starting to demand results, not excuses.

We need to spread the message to every parent and every teacher, and what better place to do it than at the National Press Club. The message is that every child can learn. The message is that public schools are a public responsibility, and every member of the public should take that responsibility seriously. The message is that it's time to stop making excuses and start measuring and producing results. The message is that it is time to stop funding failure.

The message, finally, is that by following the principles of *No Child Left Behind*, all of us, working together, can create a culture in this country where parents have more choices, teachers have more resources, districts have more flexibility, everyone has more information, and, most important, no child is left behind.

And as we move forward, we must continue to support education as President Bush has. It is indisputable that his budget offers the Department of Education historic levels of funding, but in exchange for that extraordinary investment in education, he wants us to ask ourselves questions about how we are helping to give all kids a quality education. Questions like, are our federal programs working? If not, how can we make them more successful? What can we work on? And—most important of all—are our children learning? Education reform is a dynamic process, and progress demands that we always be aware of how and where we can improve.

Every one of us, as a citizen, should be ready with a good answer to these questions. When we are asked, "What have you done for America's children?" we should be prepared to respond not with dollar figures or excuses but with pride: we did our part, as parents, neighbors, teachers, and leaders. We made sure that every child learned.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